

**Submission
No 65**

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Western Division Councils of NSW

Name: Mr Peter Laird

Date received: 26/07/2012



The Hon Robert Brown, MLC
Chair
General Purpose Standing Committee No 5
NSW Parliament House,
Sydney NSW 2000

July 25, 2012

Dear Sir,

Re – Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in NSW

The Western Division Councils of NSW represent 13 local governments in outback NSW and would like to thank the Standing Committee for this opportunity to express our views about the management of National Parks.

We will not provide any detailed or specific information regarding the management issues as the Division Members will provide this relating to their own shires. There are a number of general matters which have been brought to the attention of the Division over the past few years.

1. **Loss of rates** Local Government does not receive any rates when a National Park is declared. In some cases this has been a substantial amount of money which cannot be replaced by any other charge or a rate increase for other ratepayers.
2. **Community loss** The recently declared properties employed people who often had families and lived in the shire, buying their groceries, sending their children to local schools and supporting communities.
3. **Economic Loss** The properties were operational businesses and purchased most of their supplies, fertilisers, chemicals, petrol, vehicles etc locally, supporting businesses and therefore the community. These operations also sold their produce through local agents using transport etc.
4. **Maintenance of boundaries** These properties historically maintained their boundary fences, roads and entrances and kept in touch with the Shire if any further road work needed to be done. This infrastructure has been left to decay and Councils haven't the extra funds to take on further work.
5. **Noxious weeds, feral animals** There has been many complaints from neighbouring properties about the lack of control of pests and noxious weeds in the Parks. The large newer Parks have no onsite permanent residents, which makes it very hard to control these problems. Feral animals can decimate populations of native species, cause extensive damage to native vegetation, degrade sites of cultural significance and contribute to erosion.

According to a State of the Parks Report from the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, DECCW, as of June 2010 the Department managed a network of 800 parks and reserves, a total of 6.76 million hectares of land or over 8.4 percent of the State. Since then another 100,000 hectares of River Red Gum forests and 71,000 hectares of woodland forests and the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area have been added.ⁱ

The Western Division has no specific knowledge of whether there has been an increase in employment or funds to manage these additional areas but the reality seems to be that not enough resources are being deployed to make the system work.

The tourism benefit of these parks is very questionable. A recent tour of the Willandra and Hunthawang Parks, in the south of the State, by the Western Division Executive and some Parliamentarians found that visitors weren't welcome and there was no public access to the Parks.

A Roy Morgan Research paper released in December 2011 showed 38 million people visited National Parks in NSW in 2010. The top five parks, visited by 96% of people, were Ku-ring-gai Chase, Royal National Park, Lane Cove and Kosciusko National Parks.ⁱⁱ

The other 4% visited the parks in Western NSW, which were not specifically identified but according to the Tourism NSW website were probably Hill End, the Warrumbungles, Abercrombie and other small accessible parks, which support have tourism infrastructure.

The most popular activities in National Parks were walking, water activities and eating, which require some infrastructure, none of which is available in the western area parks.

The Western Division Councils do not wish to abolish National Parks but they would like to see

- a) a more inclusive approach to their declaration,
- b) community consultation about their control,
- c) the possibility of leasing out parts which have no environmental sensitivity
- d) compensation to local Councils for the loss of rates

As discussed, the large tracts of land in the Western Division declared as National Parks have had a detrimental effect on surrounding economies and the ability for local government to raise revenue.

Western Division Councils believe there is a great deal that can be done to make these National Parks more viable and beneficial to their surrounding communities.

I would be pleased to present in person to the Inquiry about these matters if called on.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Laird

President Western Division Councils of NSW
Mayor of Carrathool Council

ⁱ ***Managing Natural and Cultural Heritage in Parks and Reserves: National Parks and Wildlife Service.***
R J Sendt Auditor-General, June 2004

ⁱⁱ ***Annual Visits to PWG Managed Parks in New South Wales - Final Report*** - Prepared by Roy Morgan Research Ltd for -NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, June 2011